

Keywords

- > Pluralism of values
- > Methodologies
- > Multicriteria Evaluation
- > Valuation conflict
- > Development projects
- > Environmental Impact Assessment

Decision processes exclusively focussing on monetary aspects face increasing criticism and resistance. The public feels that in this way, important impacts and values are neglected

Values like **land rights, human life, aesthetics, cultural significance, sacredness, biodiversity**, etc. **cannot be adequately assessed and quantified in monetary terms.**

Therefore, their consideration in traditional cost/benefit analyses (CBAs), commonly employed to justify the development of new projects, is controversial. Fortunately, there is an entire orchestra of multicriteria instruments that can be used in support of social deliberation and social decision-making.

Multicriteria Evaluations (MCEs)

MCEs are a family of tools for decision-making. They are specifically useful for complex problems, mainly in the sphere of socio-environmental management. These problems usually involve a number of conflicting ecological, social, political and economic objectives, multiple interests groups, and different languages of valuation.

MCEs offer organised procedures to come up with alternative ways to achieve a particular policy aim. MCEs are typically dealing with the incommensurable, uncertain and irreversible effects of the decisions to be taken.

The performance of a technically sound multicriteria assessment does not guarantee the reinforcement of environmental justice. A strong element of public and/or stakeholder engagement is also a must. Advised characteristics of MCEs for the use of environmental justice organisation (EJOs) are:

- accounting for different types of



Deliberation and learning is a prerequisite of a MCE supporting environmental justice

Source: REEDS - UVSQ

knowledge (monetary and non-monetary; quantitative and qualitative data);

- providing opportunities for learning during the appraisal process;
- ensure transparency of each step of the appraisal process, in particular in regards to the possible use of supporting tools (e.g. software packages).

Illustration

Decisions on extractive activities are major issues of 'social choice', for instance with oil extraction in the Ecuadorian Yasuní region and the Niger Delta, gas fracking, or coal. This is because they are at the same time a huge source of revenue as well as a considerable cause of socio-environmental damage, especially on populations living nearby exploitation sites. As rich deposits are increasingly emptied, the extraction frontier is now arriving in areas where natural and human diversity are very sensitive and vulnerable.

In such situations, is oil exploitation income worth its monetary and non-monetary costs at local, national and international levels? Because the impacts and benefits are unequally distributed among different stakeholders (e.g. local populations, governments, Northern consumers, Nature), this question is typically a multicriteria problem where MCEs, with the largest participation possible, can shed some crucial light.



Controversial oil pipeline in Ecuador

In many oil-related projects, participative MCEs should be carried out

Photo: Flickr CC/guenno



Dam over the Narmada river (India)

A participative MCE would have been well-advised in a project that caused many conflicts with local populations

Photo: Wikimedia commons/Nwwchar

The solution

- To policymakers: **Instead of relying on CBAs, use MCEs for decision-making wherever possible**

MCEs offer the most **comprehensive analysis** (including components of CBAs) of a diverse range of complex situations involving various stakeholders with competing values and interests. They have more potential to come up with a **creative compromise supported by social coalitions**.
- To civil society and researchers: **Make sure that MCEs include substantial participation and deliberation all along the process**

Being participative and transparent, MCEs' **legitimacy** is much greater than straight CBAs. However, only broad and continued stakeholder participation in the **deliberation process** will enhance legitimacy in the eyes of the public at large. Whenever the population comes in the deliberation process only at stages when key decisions are already made, their legitimate claims will then be disregarded, the MCE has been spoilt.
- To all: **Promote the inclusion of MCEs in Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) and Social Impact Assessments (SIA), before the launching of a development project**

Through MCEs, all the implications of a given project will be considered and evaluated, ultimately providing **more complete insights and more options** in decision-making processes. There is no reason why MCEs should not become **standard procedure in EIA**, thereby thoroughly replacing CBAs.

Background

In EJOLT publication *Guide to Multicriteria Evaluation for Environmental Justice Organisations*, three methods with the desirable characteristics are explained in some detail.

1. Social Multicriteria Evaluation (SMCE) finds a balance between the various dimensions of a given social choice problem. Once the decision-making context has been investigated, each option (or alternative) is evaluated pairwise against the relevant criteria. The aim is to identify a 'compromise solution'. The latter is expressed through the overall performance rank for each option synthesising the views of all the participating stakeholders.

2. Multicriteria Mapping (MCM) is an interview-based MCE whereby individual stakeholders are invited to appraise the performance of options against their own sets of criteria. Participants are free to introduce new options of their own choosing without being forced to make trade-offs. In the end, it emphasises the exploration of the diversity of different perspectives, rather than artificially combining these into a single picture.

3. The Integraal framework consists of six steps, guiding the process of multicriteria and multi-actor assessment and deliberation. The key principle is to constitute a 'deliberation forum' that offers opportunities for participants to explore progressively different aspects of the agreed problem. Iterative deliberation exercises allow participants to go deeper and to gain or exploit more detailed information. They foster collective learning and transparent evaluation of the different options.

These three types of MCE are widely recognised and doable with relatively limited means. While the SMCE aims at calculating a final ranking of options, the other two methods pay respect to the different value systems and thus usually do not end up with a clear final ranking but serve as a basis for political prioritisation.

For more information

Guide to Multicriteria Evaluation for Environmental Justice Organisations. EJOLT Report No. 8, available at:

www.ejolt.org/reports

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The project supports the work of Environmental Justice Organisations, uniting scientists, well known activist organisations, think-tanks and policy-makers from the fields of environmental law, environmental health, political ecology, ecological economics, to talk about issues related to Ecological Distribution.

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